

Top Ag Issues, Better News Conferences

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Abstract

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Farm magazine editors met in Atlanta recently to discuss how to run more professional news conferences and to hear farmers suggest stories they want covered in 1983.

"How to make a decent living" is one of the most critical current issues facing farmers today, members of the American Agricultural Editors Association (AAEA) were told during their annual winter Communications Clinic. Another important challenge is the education of "city people about the farmer's need for profit," panel members said.

Farm panel members addressing the ag magazine editors were Mr. and Mrs. Ben Overstreet of Dawsonville, Ga.; Mr. and Mrs. Gaines Wilson, Thomaston, Ga.; and Mr. and Mrs. Jim Raines, Rydal, Ga.

Other important story topics listed by the farmers included the futures market, use of the computer in farm management, new equipment and ideas, success stories, soil fertility and farm safety. The farmers expressed interest in current research, legislation and international trade.

Magazine editors conducting a panel on "How to Run More Professional News Conferences" were Bill Kelsey, former director of public relations, Massey-Ferguson; Frank Holdmeyer, machinery editor, Farm Progress Publications; and Earl Manning, regional editor, Progressive Farmer.

News conferences should be held "only when necessary," Manning suggested. "They should also be time-effective. Don't cram a one-half-day session into two days, if you know what I mean."

Holdmeyer emphasized the importance of being specific when sending stories or information to the magazine editors. Articles on swine production should be sent to the hog editor; "Know who these people are," he said.

Press kits distributed at news conferences, he said, should contain copies of news releases, fact sheets, whole texts of speeches, biographical information on key people, sufficient photos, and exclusive photos.

News conferences can be counterproductive if they are not used with discretion, according to Kelsey. Holdmeyer agreed, "If you're not sure whether to hold a news conference for some announcement, don't."

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